DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 368 036 EA 025 614

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TITLE A Planning Model for Local Administrator Mentor Program Development.
PUB DATE Feb 94
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Administrators (San Francisco, CA, February 1994).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Education; Cooperative Programs; Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; *Management Development; *Mentors; Models; *Planning; *Program Development; School Districts

ABSTRACT

Mentoring is a continuing process wherein individuals within an organization provide support and guidance to others (mentees or proteges) to help them become effective contributors to organizational goals. Although mentoring can enhance both teacher and administrator effectiveness, this paper focuses on developing mentoring programs for aspiring, beginning, and practicing administrators. To help school districts overcome program development difficulties, a planning model for use in individual school districts or consortia of school systems is presented. The mentor planning model consists of four steps: (1) initial program planning and development (including forming a mentor planning team and deciding who will be mentored); (2) program implementation (involving issues such as identifying and training mentors, matching mentors with proteges, and developing specific mentoring skills); (3) program assessment and revision; and (4) future directions (developing additional professional development activities for administrators). The rationale for starting a mentoring program and possible benefits for mentors, proteges, and districts are discussed. (MLH)

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ED 368 036

A PLANNING MODEL FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATOR MENTOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

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Paper presented at the Annual "Conference Within a Convention"
American Association of School Administrators Convention
San Francisco, California
February, 1994

EA 025614

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A PLANNING MODEL FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATOR MENTOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

One of the strategies frequently suggested as a way to provide ongoing professional development and support to both aspiring and practicing school administrators is mentoring. As we define it, mentoring is a continuing process wherein individuals within an organization provide support and guidance to others so that it may be possible for these individuals (often referred to as "proteges" or "mentees") to become more effective contributors to the goals of the organization. In school settings, we have been proponents of the use of this practice as a way to assist both teachers and administrators in becoming more effective. Our particular concern has been on the development of mentoring programs as a way to guide administrator development. We believe that it is possible to think of mentoring as a way to help three distinct groups of individuals: those who aspire to administrative roles, those who are first beginning their administrative careers, and those who have prior experience as educational administrators.

While mentoring as a way to enhance the professional development of educational administrators is often noted as a promising practice, however, many school districts shy away from the adoption of this practice. A wide variety of reasons contribute to this fact. One important consideration, however, seems to be the belief that it is too difficult or time-consuming for a school system to engage in the process of program development for a

mentoring scheme for administrative personnel. This paper provides information related to a planning model which may be easily adopted by a local school system with an interest in adopting a mentor program. Our model is based on our work with the National Association of Elementary School Principals and other agencies during the past five years. We suggest that the model may be applicable for use in individual school districts, or in consortia of school systems which have an interest in working together to form collaborative mentor programs for administrative personnel.

In this paper, we provide an overview of a mentor planning model which consists of the following four steps: (1) Initial Program Planning and Development (including the formation of a mentor planning team, and deciding who will be mentored); (2) Implementing the Program (involving such issues as identifying mentors, training mentors, matching mentors with proteges, and developing specific mentoring skills); (3) Assessing the Program; and (4) Deciding What's Next (developing additional professional development activities for administrators). Before we proceed with these issues, however, let us consider something even more fundamental, namely the reasons why a school system may wish to begin an administrative mentoring program in the first place.

Why Start a Mentoring Program?

If a school district adopts a mentoring program, a strong commitment will be needed to support the effort. This does not necessarily imply a lot of money. On the other hand, time must be devoted to mentor training,

development, and opportunities for mentoring to take place. Adopting a program also means that a district accepts the fact that its administrators are more than building managers. They are viewed as true professionals who have wisdom and experience to share with others.

If mentoring implies changes in attitudes and job descriptions, time commitment, and some financial support, why would a school system even consider this kind of program? Over the years, we have found that quality school districts are promoting mentoring programs because there are many benefits for school leaders, and these benefits are likely to be achieved by those are mentors, their proteges, and school districts.

Benefits to Mentors

Some of the benefits we have found for those administrators who serve as mentors to their colleagues include:

a. Greater overall satisfaction with their jobs as administrators. (Like any good teacher, a mentor learns as much as those who are mentored).

b. Increased recognition from peers. (People who get a reputation as being organizational helpers usually achieve a higher status in the system).

c. Additional opportunities for personal career advancement.

d. Renewed enthusiasm for the profession.

Benefits to Proteges

As we have talked with individuals who have been proteges, we have heard the following benefits:

a. Proteges feel more confident about their professional competence.

b. Proteges see theory translated into practice.

c. Communication skills are enhanced.

d. Mentoring is a way to learn the "tricks of the trade."

e. Mentoring makes people feel as if they belong.

Benefits to Districts

School systems also gain from the implementation of mentoring programs for administrators:

a. They report that they have more capable staffs.

b. An attitude of lifelong learning is created among all administrators.

c. Higher motivation levels and job satisfaction are found in the staff.

d. The staff demonstrates an improved sense of self-esteem.

e. Greater organizational productivity results.

Initial Program Planning and Development: Setting the Stage

Before setting up a mentoring program for the first time in a school district, it is necessary to outline the main components of the plan: its definition, purpose, and goals. Once a district has decided to adopt a mentoring program as a way to promote effective professional development for its administrative team, it needs to develop an implementation plan. This should be the responsibility of a mentor planning team.

The mentor planning team is a critical first step in the process of initiating a mentoring program. We have found that, unless a representa-

tive sample of local decision makers is involved from the outset, mentoring may not be maintained as a continuing form of professional development. The composition of the team must be unique to each school system and should be based on local concerns, conditions, and realities. It may consist of the district personnel director, the district curriculum coordinator or coordinator of staff development (if the district maintains these roles), representative building principals, and perhaps representatives of the local community. There are no absolutely "correct" answers to the question concerning who should be involved in the team.

A school district plan should address the following broad categories, and also respond to individual questions specified below each broad category:

I. Definition
   - A. Are terms used in the implementation plan clearly defined?
   - B. Is the use of terms used throughout the plan consistent with selected definitions?

II. Purpose, Rationale, or Philosophy
   - A. Is there a statement of purpose for the plan?
   - B. Is the purpose compatible with
     1. the school board's philosophy of education?
     2. the professional development plan for the district?
   - C. Are fundamental reasons for the existence of a mentoring program stated?

D. Does the rationale include statements of belief concerning areas related to mentoring?

1. Does each statement of belief have a rational basis?
2. Are statements of belief compatible with each other?

E. Does the rationale include specific implications of stated beliefs for mentoring?

1. Do the specific implications flow logically from the general belief?
2. Are implications compatible with each other?

F. Is the rationale compatible with

1. state or national trends?
2. the school board's general philosophy of education or expected outcomes?

III. Goals and Objectives

A. Are broad program goals written?

B. Are program goals appropriately related to stated needs?

C. Are specific objectives written for each goal?

D. Are the goals and objectives compatible with

1. each other?
2. the school board's philosophy of education?
3. goals and objectives of other components of the district's professional development program?
4. the purpose and rationale of the mentoring program?

E. Does the plan include provisions for revising, adding, or deleting program objectives as a result of needs assessments administered to mentors and all administrators?

F. Does the plan include provisions for mentors and all other administrators to set individual objectives?

These questions are meant only to serve as a starting point for a school system as it begins to plan for the implementation of a mentoring program. Other issues must be decided at the local level, with the involvement of the Mentor Planning Team.

Implementation: Putting It All Together

After the stage has been set through the efforts of the Planning Team and others, it is possible to begin the implementation process. Some of the major issues that need to be addressed at this point are mentor selection, mentor training, mentor assignment, matching system roles and responsibilities, and target groups. The following represents an outline that provides an overview of these issues:

IV. Mentor Selection

A. Are eligibility requirements for becoming a mentor stated?

B. Are procedures for nominating mentors stated?

C. Are criteria for selecting mentors stated?

D. Are all elements of the mentor selection process compatible with

1. the overall purposes of the mentoring program?

2. the rationale of the mentoring program?

3. the goals and objectives of the mentoring program?

V. Mentor Training

A. Is orientation planned for the mentors?

1. Are goals and objectives for mentor orientation listed?

2. Is there a tentative schedule of activities for mentor orientation?

3. Does the plan for mentor orientation include making mentors aware of

a. their roles and responsibilities?

b. mentor training activities in which they will participate?

c. support, rewards, and incentives for mentors?

d. the district's procedures for evaluating mentor performance?

B. Is there a plan for preliminary training for new mentors to be held following mentor orientation and prior to the initiation of mentoring?

1. Are the goals and objectives for preliminary mentor training listed?

2. Is there a schedule of activities for preliminary mentor training?

3. Do goals, objectives, and activities in the preliminary mentor training plan focus on knowledge and skills that

will be needed by mentors during the first few weeks of mentoring?

C. Is there a plan for long-term mentor training?

D. Are there plans for mentor orientation, preliminary training for new mentors, and long-term mentor training based on the development of a preliminary needs assessment?

E. Are all elements of the training plan consistent with existing professional development programs for the district, and the district's philosophy or mission statement?

F. Are human resources identified to coordinate and implement each planned mentor training activity?

G. Are material resources necessary to carry out mentor training identified?

VI. Mentor Assignment and Matching

A. Are there criteria established for assigning mentors?

B. Is there a description of procedures for matching mentors with administrators?

C. Are criteria and procedures for matching mentors and proteges compatible with the overall purposes of professional development for administrators in the district?

VII. System Roles and Responsibilities and Mentor Support

A. Are program responsibilities of your school district's central

office, building level responsibilities, and responsibilities of other organizations involved in the mentoring program clearly defined and differentiated?

B. Are the roles and responsibilities of all people involved in the mentoring program clearly defined?

C. Are supports and rewards provided to mentors?

VIII. Identifying Appropriate Target Groups

A. Will the mentoring program be directed exclusively at the needs of beginning school administrators? Or, will it represent a form of professional development available to all administrators?

B. Is there a clear understanding of the kinds of issues that need to be addressed in mentoring programs for beginning administrators, as contrasted with topics more appropriate for veterans?

Local school districts may need to consider additional questions related to the actual implementation of a program. Again, the Mentor Planning Team should assume primary responsibility for responding to these issues.

Appraisal: How Did It Work?

School districts must also consider a variety of questions designed to help determine whether the mentoring program achieved its goals and

objectives, whether the implementation process seemed to be successful, and whether changes might be needed in the initial program design or implementation plan.

IX. Program Evaluation and Revision

A. Phases of Program Evaluation

1. Context evaluation

a. Is there a plan for identifying environmental factors that might affect your mentoring program or its outcomes? Does the plan include methods for measuring the effects of these factors on the mentoring program and its outcomes?

b. Are there provisions for determining if the program needs assessment correctly identified the needs of mentors and all district administrators?

2. Input evaluation

a. Are there provisions for evaluating your written program?

b. Are there provisions for evaluating the appropriateness and adequacy of human and material resources assigned to the mentor program?

3. Process evaluation

a. Are there provisions for determining whether the mentor program is implemented according to your stated program goals?

b. If any components of the mentoring program are not implemented according to your plan, are there provisions for identifying the lack of implementation? Are there provisions for identifying effects of the lack of implementation?

4. Outcomes evaluation

a. Is there a plan to measure whether or not program objectives have been met?

b. Is there a plan to measure positive and negative unintended program outcomes?

5. Are there provisions for analyzing data from each phase of the program evaluation and synthesizing the results of that analysis in a comprehensive evaluation report?

B. Are there procedures for revising the mentor program in response to the program evaluation?

C. Are human resources to coordinate and implement program evaluation and revision identified?

D. Are material resources necessary for program evaluation identified?

X. Needs Assessments for Program Modifications

A. Mentors

1. Are provisions made for formal and informal ongoing mentor needs assessments?

2. Are provisions made for modifying mentor training or mentor support as a result of the mentor needs assessment administered during the first year of implementation?

B. Are human resources identified to coordinate and implement mentor needs assessment and corresponding modifications in the mentor program?

C. Are material resources necessary to carry out mentor needs assessment identified?

The questions listed in this paper are meant to assist local school district officials as they begin to formulate a local approach to an effective mentoring program that can be used to assist in the professional development of school administrators. Simply responding to the questions, however, will not create the plan. Instead, each system must look at its own local priorities and conditions to determine appropriate strategies to be used in developing an effective program.

In addition to the issues raised, it may be helpful for a school district to think of other conditions that need to be addressed as part of the implementation process for a mentoring program in any district:

- Commitment by the central office and school board is critical
- School board policy that is supportive of the program is important
- A local Mentor Planning Team should be created
- A budget must be planned
- Requisite human and resource materials need to be identified
- The program structure should be designed

- Goals and objectives are necessary
- The implementation plan should be specified
- Evaluation processes need to be identified before the program actually gets underway

What's Next?

There is a great tendency, whenever great energy has been expended in any effort, to relax after that effort has been carried out. Planning for and implementing a mentoring program for the school administrators in a district represent such an activity. As we have stated in this paper, program planning and development require a lot of hard work on the part of many different people. And those who are actively involved in the program as mentors and proteges must spend a considerable amount of time and energy in their work if the program is to be effective. After one year, there can be strong tendency to breathe a sigh of relief and simply let the next year "happen." Unfortunately, that kind of attitude will do little to ensure that all of the current year's hard work will return many benefits to a school district.

One of the more disappointing things about program development in education in general, whether it involves new curriculum, teaching practices, or professional development programs, is that it is often viewed as a process with a very short life span. Experienced educators are well aware of the fact that in certain school systems, change is represented by a series of gimmicks that seem to come and go every year. It is not unusual to hear educators reflect on activities in their school systems in

terms of which program lasted how long and in which years. Both the lay public and professional educators are faced with an endless and bewildering array of disconnected activities characterized by jargon and buzz words. It is therefore not surprising that many innovations in education do not seem to have much of an impact on improvement, and this results in understandable skepticism and cynicism on the part of many.

A mentoring program for administrators must be viewed as only a part of a total professional development program for a district's leadership team. There have been many cases of school systems embracing the concept of mentoring as a sort of ornament to be added to the activities of a school system without much thought to how it fits in the total scheme. And in those cases, it is not surprising to find out that mentoring has not survived beyond one or two years.

How Does Professional Development Fit?

An unfortunate reality is that, when times are tough in a school system, one of the first activities to disappear is support for staff development and inservice education. That is true for programs for teachers, and it is even more true for professional development for school administrators. Most people recognize that such a practice is shortsighted, but little is done to change things so that there is recognition of professional development--for teachers and as more than some sort of frill.

We believe that one of the reasons why the public has such a negative view of the importance of professional development activities for educators

is that we rarely spend time to articulate the purposes and priorities associated with learning programs for adults in our schools. It is critical for any district to periodically review its vision of developmental activities available for its leadership team and then base its program development on that vision. After that, it may be possible to add a mentoring program.

Reviewing Local Priorities

As a way to begin the process of determining what is being done at the local school district level for the professional development of school administrators, we believe that it may be useful to think about local responses to the following questions:

1. What is your vision of effective leadership in your district?
2. What is your local district vision of school effectiveness?
3. What are your expectations regarding the ways in which administrators would support this local vision of effectiveness?
4. What is the relationship between existing priorities for the district and new initiatives in administrative professional development for your leadership team?
5. How does your program for administrative professional development overlap or connect with ongoing professional development activities for classroom teachers?

We are concerned that a school district might simply initiate mentoring for school administrators as an add-on program that has no connection to daily life in a school system. It is not a luxury, without

any real impact on those essential features of schooling related to student learning.

What Happens After Mentoring?

Another course of action we recommend in addition to making certain that mentoring does not appear as a kind of add-on activity in a school system is to work out a way to ensure that the mentoring program will persist. This can be done by establishing a structure to support the maintenance of mentoring in the future.

One example of such a structural support would be the institutionalization of the mentor role as an ongoing position in the school system. Often, we see districts designate a few administrators as mentors for a year, then identify others to serve in this role in the next year of the program. Mentoring in such a context becomes viewed as a rotated honor rather than a core responsibility to be carried out by those with special training and expertise. Mentoring is hard work, and it should not be used only as a ceremonial award to an administrator for long service.

Once administrators in a district have been designated as professional development mentors, efforts should be made to bring these individuals together on a regular basis to maintain enthusiasm and institutionalize the role of mentor. Part of these sessions may be devoted to social events that focus on the needs of administrative mentors to interact with others, and part of the time may be directed toward learning activities that will help practicing mentors fine-tune their skills.

Reference

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